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HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

August 2010

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The August luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, August 19, 2010, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The guest speakers will be Cheryl Grace and John Anderson of the Bay St. Louis Little Theater. They will speak on the grand opening of, first production in, and future renovations to the theater. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call **by noon on Wednesday, August 18**, to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-five people, and to apprise us of the number for whom to prepare. The price of the lunch is \$10.00.



Elmwood Manor

17th ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR

Even though October is still a couple of months away, it's not too early to begin finalizing plans for the Hancock County Historical Society Annual Cemetery Tour. It will be held on Halloween night, Sunday, October 31, 2010, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street. We will need volunteers to help prepare the cemetery for the tour (mark the path, etc.), to portray citizens buried there, to act as guides, and to serve at the Lobrano House. To volunteer, please call 467-4090

Elmwood Manor

By
Eddie Coleman

Elmwood, which stood at 900 North Beach Blvd. prior to Hurricane Katrina, was the manor house of the Cowand-Fields plantation. Its history began in 1768 when the French and Indian War ended. At that time a peace agreement was signed between France and England, giving all French territory to Spain.

During her time of governance of the territory, Spain gave grants of land to whoever would cultivate the ground and make their homes in the territory. Many men of French and Spanish extraction availed themselves of the government's offer and became the owners of extensive tracts of land. One such person was Louis Alexis La Sasser (Lassassier or Saucier), who received an extensive parcel of land on the western shore of the Bay of St. Louis, dating from 1786. However, after Spain returned

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Eddie Coleman, Editor
Pat Fuchs, PublisherPublished monthly by the
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Marianne Plum, Webmaster**LOBRANO HOUSE
HOURS**MONDAY — FRIDAY
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“TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION.”

this territory to France, it was necessary for all these Spanish land tracts to be confirmed by the French government.

In the early part of 1794, the Baron de Carondelet, then governor of these provinces, had the Spanish grant of La Sassier made good by the French government. Later this same year as he was returning from France, La Sassier was shipwrecked and lost his papers, including his grant to his lands along the western boundary of the Bay of St. Louis.

In 1798 La Sassier applied to Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, Brigadier of the Royal Army and Governor General of those provinces. At the request of the Baron de Carondelet, General Gayoso de Lemos directed his secretary, Don Andrew Lopez Armesto, to search for a record of the La Sassier claim. Copies were found and Louis Alexis La Sassier again gained possession of his lands, and in 1823 a grant was made to his widow, Melite La Sassier. [This grant is recorded in Deed Book A, pp. 298—303 in the Hancock County Courthouse according to Helene Cowand Price.]

Here is where the histories differ. According to several accounts, the land on which Elmwood stood and surrounding lands were purchased by Jesse Cowand in the early 1800's from Melite La Sassier. Mr. Cowand was a native of Virginia who had migrated to New Orleans in the early 1800's. One account says that he was a sea captain. In a WPA interview in 1937 with the

grandson and namesake of the original Jesse Cowand, Mr. Cowand said that his grandfather began work on his home, Elmwood Manor, but left to fight in the War of 1812. Upon his return he completed construction. If this account is correct, then Cowand must have left New Orleans and purchased the property from the widow La Sassier in the early 1800's to begin construction of the house c. 1804.

However, the great granddaughter of the original Jesse Cowand, Helene Cowand Price, gave a different account in January 1980.

In Mrs. Price's account Jesse Cowand migrated from Virginia to New Orleans in the early 1800's. When the War of 1812 came along, he participated in the Battle of New Orleans and was ultimately captured. After the war he established himself in the city as a cooper, making and repairing wooden casks and tubs. As further proof of Cowand's later arrival in Bay St. Louis, she also claimed to have in her possession an old ledger used in this business, the last entry being dated January 15, 1825.

According to Mrs. Price the land on which Elmwood stood and the surrounding lands were purchased by Jesse Cowand in 1826-1829 from Melite La Sassier. She also said it is believed that construction of Elmwood was begun in the early 1800's, prior to the War of 1812, and completed by Jesse Cowand about 1830. She said that he and his family occupied what was called "The Cottage" while Elmwood Manor was being com-

pleted.

Is it not possible that both accounts are true and that each family member has given a different thread of the same story to weave a fuller, richer history of Elmwood Manor? In his book *Louisiana's Loss, Mississippi's Gain*, Robert Scharff presents information from an article in the *Sea Coast Echo* from 1978 which refers to the original Jesse Cowand as "one of those newly enriched absentee cotton planters" and also states that Elmwood was built as "a summer estate."

Perhaps Mr. Cowand bought the land in the early 1800's. He began building the manor house, and the War of 1812 intervened. Afterward he established his cooperage in New Orleans, and later he completed the manor in the mid-1820's.

In either event, it is generally accepted that construction of Elmwood Manor began c. 1804 and was completed by Mr. Cowand in the mid-1820's. The house was a two story brick structure, and the first loads of bricks used to build the house came as ballast in ships from Spain and Portugal. Other bricks came from Pensacola, but the mortar used in all of them contained crushed clam shells left on the shore of the Bay of St. Louis by early Native Americans.

The front and back of the house were built identically with brick columns on the bottom and Tuscan columns on the second level. The porches extended the entire width of the house and

measured 10 1/2 feet by 54 feet. Each room had double French doors leading onto either the upper or lower porches.

The interior of the house consisted of double parlors, living room, and library downstairs with a twelve foot wide breezeway that ran from the front to the rear of the building. The second floor consisted of four large bedrooms and again a twelve foot wide breezeway that ran the entire length of the house.

The exterior and interior walls were solid brick as thick as five bricks with the interior walls finished with plaster. Floors were made of heart pine, six inches wide. Each room had a fireplace with mantles displaying hand carved anchors and chains reflecting the interest of its builder.

Cowand-Fields Plantation comprised 550 acres. The plantation's main crop was Sea

Island cotton. Flourishing in the salt air climate of Hancock County, it is the finest grade of cotton and highly prized in the marketplace. The fluff of Sea Island Cotton is made up of very long, soft fibers, and cloth made from it feels almost as smooth as silk, making it very valuable.

Sadly, Elmwood Manor exists only in old photographs and in the memories of residents of Hancock County. Having withstood the destructive force of hurricanes for two hundred years, she succumbed to the raging winds and surging tide of Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005. Where once a regal, elegant home had stood, only a pile of bricks remained.

SOURCES:

Scharff, Robert G. *Louisiana's Loss, Mississippi's Gain*. Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick Publishing Corp., 1999.

Vertical files of the Hancock County Historical Society.



Ruins of Elmwood Manor, post-Katrina 2005

Did You Know This about Hancock County?

By
Scott Bagley

Did you know that Dorothy Dix, one of the most famous and influential journalists of the 20th Century, got her start following a chance encounter right here in Hancock County? Ms. Dix, whose real name was Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer, was most noted for her advice columns, but she also reported on some of the most sensational criminal trials during the first half of the 20th Century. As the preeminent predecessor of today's popular advice columnists, Dorothy Dix was the country's highest paid and most widely read female journalist at the time of her death in 1951.

Dorothy Dix was born on a plantation located on the borders of Tennessee and Kentucky in 1861. During her early twenties, as a result of the stresses of a troubled marriage, her family sent her

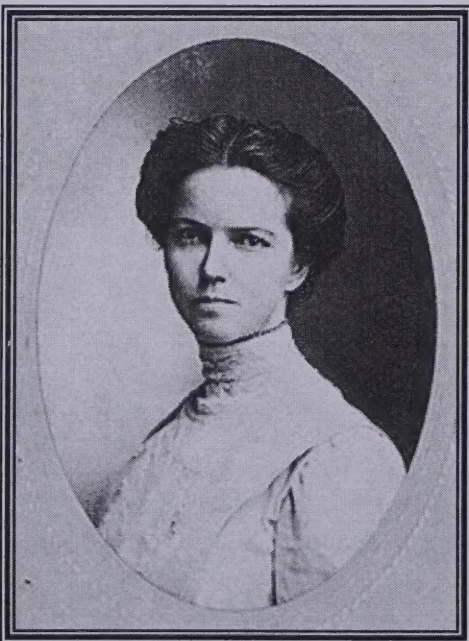
to the Mississippi Gulf Coast for rest and relaxation. The location chosen was a beachfront cottage in what is now Waveland. The house next door to this cottage happened to be occupied by none other than the remarkable "Pearl Rivers," Mrs. Eliza Jane Poitevant Nicholson—the poet who owned and edited *The Daily Picayune* (currently *The Times-Picayune*) of New Orleans. A close relationship between these two special women followed resulting in Mrs. Nicholson offering Ms. Dix her first job with a newspaper in 1893. The rest, you might say, is history.

Dorothy Dix first used her pen name in 1896 and chose it because she liked the name *Dorothy* and *Dix* in honor of an old family slave named Mr. Dick who had saved the Meriwether family silver during the Civil War. Within months her column was renamed *Dorothy Dix Talks* and under that name was to become the world's longest running newspaper feature. Her widespread popularity started in 1923 when Ms. Dix signed with the Philadelphia based *Public Ledger Syndicate*. During the column's long history it was published in 273 papers. At its peak in 1940, Dix was receiving 100,000 letters a year, and her estimated reading audience was about sixty million people all over the world.

SOURCES:

Kane, Harnett Thomas. *Dear Dorothy Dix: The Story of a Compassionate Woman*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1952.

"Dorothy Dix." 1 Jun 2010. 8 Jul 2010 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorothy_Dix>.



Dorothy Dix

BOOKS FOR SALE AT LOBRANO HOUSE

Bay Saint Louis: Celebrating the First 300 Years
By the HCHS (\$15.00)

A nostalgic keepsake of the city's history including descriptions and pictures of many of the historic buildings and houses especially those along Beach Boulevard prior to Katrina

*Blueberry Peaches,
Red Robin Pie*

By Stella LaViolette
and Paul Estronza La Violette (\$25.00)
An annotated cookbook of Gulf Coast recipes

Heritage Cookbook

By the HCHS (\$15.00)
A collection of our members' favorite family recipes

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By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)
An intriguing anthology of tales of a tomcat living in a beach house on the Gulf Coast

Katrina Cookbook

By Charlet Russell (\$19.95)
A collection of recipes by Bayou Tours

One Dog, Two Dogs, Three Dogs, Four...

By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)
Twice told tales of several dogs living in a beach house on the Gulf Coast

Scrapbook of Treasured Memories

By Connie Heitzmann and Betty Stechmann (\$20.00)
A book of art, photography, and reminiscence of the Gulf Coast

Sink or Be Sunk

By Paul La Violette (\$30.00)
A recounting of the naval battle in the Mississippi Sound preceding the Battle of New Orleans in 1812

Vintage Photographs of Hancock County
By

Lori Gordon
(\$15.00 per photograph)
These photographs come from the vast photographic collection of the Historical Society. Each photograph has been restored and matted by local artist Lori Gordon.

West Side Stories

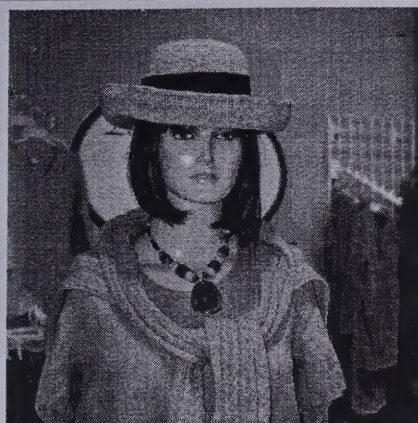
Before, During, and After on Mississippi's West Coast

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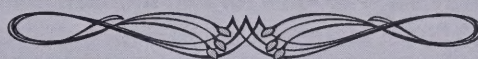
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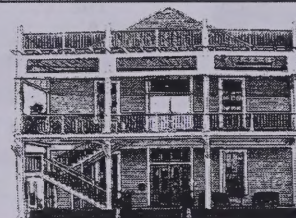
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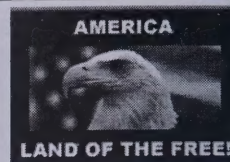
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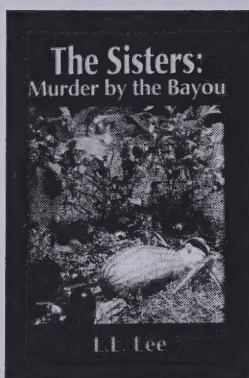
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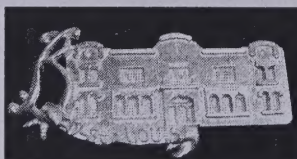


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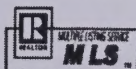
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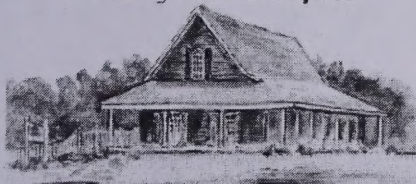
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